



**State of Wisconsin
Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Division of Food Safety**

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FACT SHEET FOR FOOD PROCESSORS

Coliform Bacteria

Background

Coliforms are a group of bacteria comprised of Gram-negative, non-sporeforming rods which may be aerobic or anaerobic. Many of these organisms are classified in the genera *Escherichia*, *Enterobacter* or *Klebsiella*.

Some of the coliform bacteria originate from the intestinal tract of warm-blooded animals, while others are environmental contaminants.

Significance

The presence of coliform bacteria in food products is an indication of unsanitary conditions or poor hygiene practices during or after production.

Testing for coliform bacteria is not intended to detect fecal contamination, but rather to measure the overall quality of the food and the quality of the practices used to minimize bacterial contamination during production.

Coliforms are regarded as indicators of contamination after heat treatment.

Enumeration of these organisms in heat-treated foods can be used to assess the adequacy of the heat processing.

Prevention

Proper sanitation and handling during and after processing.

Following appropriate heat treatment procedures.